

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

NIGEL C. SYKES,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	Civ. No. 11-147-SLR
)	
DELAWARE STATE POLICE and)	
SEASONS PIZZA,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

MEMORANDUM ORDER

At Wilmington this 5th day of May, 2011, having screened the case pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915 and § 1915A;

IT IS ORDERED that the complaint is dismissed as frivolous pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915 and § 1915A and plaintiff is given leave to amend, for the reasons that follow:

1. **Background.** Plaintiff Nigel C. Sykes ("plaintiff") is a pretrial detainee held at the Howard R. Young Correctional Center ("HRYCI"), Wilmington, Delaware. He filed this complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging assault by employees of Seasons Pizza and excessive force by Delaware State Police officers.¹ Plaintiff proceeds pro se and has been granted leave to proceed without prepayment of fees.

2. **Standard of review.** This court must dismiss, at the earliest practicable time, certain in forma pauperis and prisoner actions that are frivolous, malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. See

¹When bringing a § 1983 claim, a plaintiff must allege that some person has deprived him of a federal right, and that the person who caused the deprivation acted under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988).

28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) (in forma pauperis actions); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (actions in which prisoner seeks redress from a governmental defendant); 42 U.S.C. § 1997e (prisoner actions brought with respect to prison conditions). The court must accept all factual allegations in a complaint as true and take them in the light most favorable to a pro se plaintiff. *Phillips v. County of Allegheny*, 515 F.3d 224, 229 (3d Cir. 2008); *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 93 (2007). Because plaintiff proceeds pro se, his pleading is liberally construed and his complaint, “however inartfully pleaded, must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.” *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. at 94 (citations omitted).

3. An action is frivolous if it “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) and § 1915A(b)(1), a court may dismiss a complaint as frivolous if it is “based on an indisputably meritless legal theory” or a “clearly baseless” or “fantastic or delusional” factual scenario. *Neitzke*, 490 at 327-28; *Wilson v. Rackmill*, 878 F.2d 772, 774 (3d Cir. 1989); see, e.g., *Deutsch v. United States*, 67 F.3d 1080, 1091-92 (3d Cir. 1995) (holding frivolous a suit alleging that prison officials took an inmate’s pen and refused to give it back).

4. The legal standard for dismissing a complaint for failure to state a claim pursuant to § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and § 1915A(b)(1) is identical to the legal standard used when ruling on Rule 12(b)(6) motions. *Tourscher v. McCullough*, 184 F.3d 236, 240 (3d Cir. 1999)(applying Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) standard to dismissal for failure to state a claim under § 1915(e)(2)(B)). However, before dismissing a complaint or claims for

failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to the screening provisions of 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915 and 1915A, the court must grant plaintiff leave to amend his complaint unless amendment would be inequitable or futile. See *Grayson v. Mayview State Hosp.*, 293 F.3d 103, 114 (3d Cir. 2002).

5. A well-pleaded complaint must contain more than mere labels and conclusions. See *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, ___U.S.___, 129 S.Ct. 1937 (2009); *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544 (2007). The assumption of truth is inapplicable to legal conclusions or to “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action supported by mere conclusory statements.” *Id.* at 1949. When determining whether dismissal is appropriate, the court conducts a two-part analysis. *Fowler v. UPMC Shadyside*, 578 F.3d 203, 210 (3d Cir. 2009). First, the factual and legal elements of a claim are separated. *Id.* The court must accept all of the complaint’s well-pleaded facts as true, but may disregard any legal conclusions. *Id.* at 210-11. Second, the court must determine whether the facts alleged in the complaint are sufficient to show that plaintiff has a “plausible claim for relief.”² *Id.* at 211. In other words, the complaint must do more than allege plaintiff’s entitlement to relief; rather it must “show” such an entitlement with its facts. *Id.* “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than a mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged - but it has

²A claim is facially plausible when its factual content allows the court to draw a reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged. *Iqbal*, 129 S.Ct. at 1949 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570). The plausibility standard “asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully.” *Id.* “Where a complaint pleads facts that are ‘merely consistent with’ a defendant’s liability, it ‘stops short of the line between possibility and plausibility of ‘entitlement to relief.’” *Id.*

not shown - that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Iqbal*, 129 S.Ct. at 1949 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)).

6. **Discussion.** Plaintiff names as defendants the Delaware State Police (“State Police”) and Seasons Pizza (“Seasons Pizza”). Plaintiff alleges that on November 30, 2010, he was robbed by an unknown person who gave him a gun and forced him to rob a near-by Seasons Pizza. When plaintiff entered the restaurant, he announced that he was being forced to commit a robbery. He was tackled from behind by an employee, the gun discharged, and then other employees tackled and repeatedly assaulted plaintiff with pots and pans. Next, plaintiff was doused with hot liquid and kicked. He hit his head on a metal table and lost consciousness. (D.I. 3)

7. When plaintiff regained consciousness, he discovered that he was handcuffed and being tasered by the State Police. The officers escorted plaintiff out of the restaurant. One officer punched plaintiff and another officer slammed plaintiff’s head against the trunk of the police vehicle. Plaintiff was taken to the hospital eight hours later. He seeks compensatory damages. (D.I. 3)

8. **State actor.** To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. §1983, a plaintiff must allege “the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and must show that the alleged deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law.” *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988) (citing *Parratt v. Taylor*, 451 U.S. 527, 535 (1981), *overruled in part on other grounds by Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 330-31 (1986)). To act under “color of state law” a defendant must be “clothed with the authority of state law.” *West*, 487 U.S. at 49. Seasons Pizza is a restaurant,

and its employees are private individuals who took measures to stop a robbery of the establishment. Neither Seasons Pizza, nor its employees, are “clothed with the authority of state law.” See *Reichley v. Pennsylvania Dep’t of Agric.*, 427 F.3d 236, 244-45 (3d Cir. 2005); *Biener v. Calio*, 361 F.3d 206, 216-17 (3d Cir. 2004).

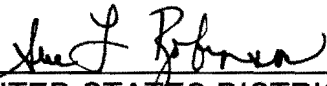
9. The § 1983 claims against Seasons Pizza have no arguable basis in law or in fact and the claims are dismissed as frivolous pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915(A)(b)(1).

10. **Eleventh Amendment immunity.** As mentioned the State Police is a named defendant. “Absent a [S]tate’s consent, the Eleventh Amendment bars a civil rights suit in federal court that names the state as a defendant.” *Laskaris v. Thornburgh*, 661 F.2d 23, 25 (3d Cir. 1981) (citing *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781 (1978) (*per curiam*)). The State of Delaware has not waived its sovereign immunity under the Eleventh Amendment. See *Rodriguez v. Stevenson*, 243 F. Supp. 2d 58, 63 (D. Del. 2002).

11. In addition, the Eleventh Amendment limits federal judicial power to entertain lawsuits against a State and, in the absence of congressional abrogation or consent, a suit against a state agency is proscribed. See *Pennhurst State School & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 98-100. Further, a state agency, such as the Delaware State Police, “is not a person” subject to claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See *Will v. Mich. Dep’t of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989).

12. The State Police is immune from suit. Therefore, the court will dismiss the claims against it pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b)(1).

13. **Conclusion.** For the above reasons, the complaint is dismissed as frivolous pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b)(1). However, since it appears plausible that plaintiff may be able to articulate a claim against alternative defendants, he will be given an opportunity to amend his pleading. *See O'Dell v. United States Gov't*, 256 F. App'x 444 (3d Cir. 2007) (not published) (leave to amend is proper where the plaintiff's claims do not appear "patently meritless and beyond all hope of redemption"). Plaintiff is given leave to file an amended complaint. If an amended complaint is not filed within thirty (30) days, then the case will be closed.


UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE